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ABSTRACT

Any college, however liberal, is liable to face some sort of protest and should prepare for it. The student personnel staff should know what to do before, during, and after the incident. Early preparations include creating a climate of trust between college and students. The latter must feel that their concerns are taken seriously and their rights supported and must, in turn, respect the college's authority and right to protect itself as an institution. This intercommunication must go on formally and through constant student/staff contact (a special responsibility of the student personnel staff). The preparations must anticipate likely situations and specify official responses. When a protest is imminent, the dean should repeat the college's published limits, discover the issues and their degree of validity, and act as liaison with officials who have real power to act on any promised concessions. If these actions do not stop the riot, further talks must be arranged, even for "non-negotiable" demands. If it still continues, the college must get rid of the dissenters or close down. Whether and when to call in the police and the press will have been among the early decisions. During the incident, the dean in person must issue warnings, define penalties, and collect offenders' names--without involving other staff members and severing their links with the students. The protest should later be analyzed less to neutralize its effects than to discover reasonable and/or needed changes. (HH)

The Role of the Student Personnel Staff Before, During
and After a Confrontation With the Institution By Students *

Introduction

The title of this paper is "The Role of the Student Personnel Staff Before, During and After a Confrontation With the Institution By Students." A title like that deserves some definitions and that is where I want to begin. By "Student Personnel Staff" I mean, chiefly, the Dean of Students, the Director of Student Activities, and the Counselors but I do not exclude any members of the Dean's team. By "confrontation" I mean the attempt of a reasonably like-minded group of students to make known to the college their dissatisfaction with and desire for change of policies outside the normal institutional channels, together with either the fact or the threat of disruption of normal institutional activities. Violence is not an essential part of the definition but it is not excluded as a possibility. "With the institution" means any element of the college, not excluding the Board.

The paper makes some presumptions. It presumes that any of our colleges could experience a confrontation as defined above even though the recent American Council on Education study indicates that only about 10% of public two year colleges had disruptive protests and only 5% had violent protests during the 1968-1969 school year. It presumes that any college with substantial minority of black students will probably have a protest of some kind and that colleges with black majorities either have had or almost certainly will have such confrontations. It further

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presumes that all of us have done some reading around this topic and that we are familiar with a very basic document, "The Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students."

For obvious reasons, the paper offers no recipes. It expresses some convictions and offers some suggestions. I conceive my role here as that of a colleague assigned to offer enough material to generate a useful discussion.

I want to conclude this introduction by making reference to some principles which underlie my attitudes and suggestions, I hope consistently. First, I consider the doctrine of in loco parentis to be a dead letter. Therefore, I do not claim to be father to my students. Paternalism is for me an unacceptable posture. Second, no matter what the institutional admissions criteria, no student is in the college by my suffrance. Hence, I am not a sponsor or patron, and I have no right to patronize. Third, the students, as citizens of the country and the community, have rights which are not endowed by the college and cannot be abrogated by the college: freedom of expression, the right of privacy, freedom of association, freedom of inquiry, the freedoms of responsible journalism, and the right to due process in disciplinary proceedings. Fourth, since the authority of the college is not paternal and since the effective exercise of authority depends on the assent of the governed, it is essential that the students be substantially involved in the formation of college policies. Fifth, the college has the right to organize itself and set limits on the activities of its members in order

to preserve its nature and its essential functions, to protect itself and its members. Therefore, it has the right to establish the tolerable limits of dissent and to impose sanctions on violators of those limits.

Before the Confrontation - Remote

Let us return to the title and give our attention to "Before the Confrontation." A question arises: "How much before?" I have chosen to divide "before" into remote and immediate. I do this because I am convinced that our reaction to stress under pressure (in this case, our conduct during a confrontation) will be conditioned if not determined by the postures, attitudes and styles of behavior which we have acquired by our habitual responses to less stressful situations.

The first element of remote preparation is the development of a climate of mutual trust between the students and the institution. The students, especially the concerned students, must sense that they are accepted as persons, understood, appreciated for their concern and taken seriously for what they really have to give: interest in the college, evaluations based on that experience, their idealism, their reactions to what is happening in the larger society around the college. The students must not have been patronized and paternalized out of their rights in the misguided hope of helping them to avoid the mistakes which they otherwise would probably make. The students must have a sense of real involvement in the making of the college policies. In those areas in which we can agree that student voice should be the primary voice, the students must

have had the experience of speaking and being listened to.

I do not need to tell you that whatever is applicable to students in general regarding the climate of trust is even more important in communities of black students. We know that we live in a time when the processes of cultural and social evolution have come to a kind of climax in the black community. It begins to appear that a real climate of trust between a predominantly white staff and a black student body may be impossible, for a while, at least.

How is a climate of trust developed? There is no formula, but some elements seem obvious. The formal policy statements of the college must reflect a philosophy which supports the rights of the students already mentioned. Between students and staff (especially the student personnel staff) there must be open lines of communication along which there is a steady exchange of information. But communication with students presents special problems. To the extent that a youth subculture really exists and to the extent that students in community colleges share characteristics of such a subculture, communication with the students has some qualities of cross-cultural communications. Persons of different cultures who wish to communicate must make a mutual effort to penetrate each other's culture. Such penetration has limits. We cannot really be students anymore than students (while they are students) can really be staff members. But it is important that each college invent settings which encourage exchanges of real information and feelings. Planned group experiences

have proved useful for these purposes. I would expect the counseling staff to supply the expertise here, under the leadership of the Dean of Students.

The roles of the student government in the governance of the college must be defined and well advertised. And they must be appropriate to the rights of the students. I reject the model for student government which has it safely appended to the Director of Student Activities so that access to the institutional machinery is only through the Director of Student Activities and then through the Dean of Students. The position of the student government should be analogous to that of the faculty organization. It should touch the central authority of the college in the same way that the faculty government does. This is not to say that its concerns will be the same or that the same weight will be given to its deliberations and recommendations in all matters; although, in some appropriate matters, the weight assigned to the student voice will be the greatest. I think it is a major responsibility of the Dean of Students to make sure that the student government is properly structured into the college.

An important contribution to the students' sense of trust will be the experience of successful intervention in institutional processes. This experience is so important that the Director of Student Activities should try to create opportunities for it if the students do not seem able to do so themselves. He should help the students to direct their attention to problems amenable to solution within a reasonable time and

which relate to the essential activities of the college. He should help the students to understand the institutional machinery, the loci of real power as they relate to the problems under consideration. He should help the students to contact that power in the most effective way. He should do all of this without violating student initiative and without compromising his relationships with the administration and faculty. I was informed recently by an experienced Director of Student Activities that a legitimate and effective student government in a community college is nearly but not quite impossible.

But a climate of trust will grow not so much out of institutional process and definitions as it will out of the innumerable human contacts of students and staff. Therefore, the most important element in a climate of trust is the character of the people who staff the institution, especially those who staff the team of the Dean of Students. If I may borrow from the paper which Dr. Terry O'Banion read to us last spring at Peoria, I would describe such ~~a~~ persons as "healthy personalities....open to experience, democratic, accepting, understanding, caring, supporting, approving, loving, non-judgmental... They tolerate ambiguity. Their decisions come from within rather than from without. They have a zest for life: for experiencing, for touching, tasting, feeling, knowing. They risk involvement. They reach out for experiences. They are not afraid to encounter others. They believe that man is basically good and given the right conditions will move in positive directions.

They believe that every student is a gifted student, that every student has untapped potentialities, that every human being can live a much fuller life than he is currently experiencing... They are interested in positive human experiences more than in negative human experiences and they believe that all human beings desire to live fuller lives."

When we talk about a climate of trust, obviously we are talking about the total institutional climate. The student personnel staff cannot create this total climate alone. Nevertheless, it is the chief contributor to such a climate, partly because it has the most direct contact with students in the matters touched on and partly because it has, I think, the responsibility to lead the rest of the institution into the development of such a climate. It is the responsibility of the Dean of Students to make sure that institutional policies and structures clearly express the rights of the students and their responsibilities and offer a proper opportunity for the exercise of these rights and responsibilities. Formal attempts to sensitize the whole college to the total human needs of the students will require the special intervention of the counseling staff because they have more opportunities to accumulate a sense of those needs and have the knowledge of techniques useful for eliciting appropriate responses from faculty and administration. All members of the student personnel staff have a special responsibility for maintaining fluid communications with students and for sensing the development of student concerns. Some staff meetings should be committed

to the conscious attempt to share, synthesize and interpret the insights developed from student contact.

Even as we agree on the necessity for a climate of trust, we recognize the special problems of the community college: rapid student turnover, tenuous institutional loyalty, greater intrusion of part-time employment, etc. In spite of these problems, the community college in its statements of philosophy and objectives has promised to develop such a climate. It expects to realize its promise from its commitment to formal student personnel work. We have the responsibility to lead the institution in this matter.

The second element of remote preparation is easier to describe but not necessarily easier to accomplish. I refer to the prior specification of institutional policies worked out by the whole college community and promulgated and explained to the whole college community. These policies relate to what might be, in the context of this paper, described as normal student activities: the role of student government, the freedoms and responsibilities of student publications, student conduct and related sanctions, student activities, student sponsored events, space allocations, the limits of organized protest. The careful delineation and observation of such policies will demonstrate to the students that they have a legitimate place in the processes of the institution but also that the college has the right to insure its work and its perdurance.

A second set of institutional policies relates to the

emergencies surrounding student confrontations themselves. Such policies should anticipate likely situations and specify institutional responses. They relate to the security of personnel and records, to the role of the security staff if the college has one, to the communication network, to the kinds of decisions reserved to various levels of authority, to the decision to call for help outside the institution, usually the police, to formal understandings with the police regarding their entry into the situation, the level of force to be used, the decisions reserved to the college and ~~to~~ the communications network with the police. In my opinion, it is the responsibility of the Dean of Students to take the initiative in the development of these policies and preparations.

Before the Confrontation - Immediate

So much for remote preparations. We come now to "immediately before." The obvious question here is: "Who can fix the point in time just before the explosion?" Even with a climate of trust and good lines of communication it will be difficult to know precisely what is happening. If the student activists responsible for the confrontation are even a little sophisticated, they will want to keep the initiative and will, therefore, try to maintain as much secrecy as possible. If the confrontation is less planned and rather the culmination of an emotional buildup it is still difficult to know the bursting point and to identify in advance the incident which will touch off the external show of force. In a confrontation,

the institution will probably be a reactor rather than an initiating agent. Nevertheless, suppose the Dean of Students has advance information on the possibility of an incident. He would, of course, communicate his information to the President and set in motion the appropriate elements of the prepared security plans. The Dean of Students should remind the students (if the leaders can be located) of the published policies and the acceptable limits of dissent. He should try to discover what the issues are and whether or not they are real. He should try to assess the degree of general student support for the position of the dissenters. He should try to get the leaders and the issues to those persons in the institution who are capable of making decisions and responding to the demands of the dissenters. That is, the persons involved in the talks should have real power to effect change. If this means the Board must be involved, then it should be involved as early as possible. Responses should be real, direct and honest. No one should promise what someone else has the power to give. Administrators, for example, should not promise changes which can be effected only with direct faculty cooperation. If a demand is unrealistic or impossible, it should be so declared.

It may happen that this kind of prior intervention will be fore-doomed to failure because the student group involved is more intent on a public demonstration than it is on the solution of problems. If we can trust the findings of studies on the characteristics on this kind of dissenting student we

would conclude that failure for this reason is unlikely in the community college.

During the Confrontation

Let us move on to "during." It is very probable that, if a real confrontation situation has been developing in the college, the kind of negotiations which I have described for "immediately before" will be taking place after the initial confrontation incident. What has already been said about the need to bring together the dissidents and the persons in the college who can really address themselves to their problems applies with greater urgency to this stage. By now there will be a list of "non-negotiable" demands so that the issues will be easily discoverable. In spite of the hard rhetoric, if lines of communication are open at all, negotiation is very likely possible. One of the demands will probably be a general prior amnesty for all involved in the protest. I do not favor any prior amnesty which sets aside the published limits for actions of dissent or the sanctions attached to violation of those limits. During the confrontation it is essential that representatives of the college exhibit a great deal of patience and coolness. They must expect to spend much time in discussion, they must expect to hear inflammatory and emotional statements none of which is likely to be very complimentary, they must expect delays and tardiness, lack of courtesy, changing leadership, change of positions and possibly even change of issues.

When the confrontation involves not simply the threat of disruption but the fact of disruption of normal college operations, we have a new set of problems. The Dean of Students should be on the scene to ascertain that there is real interference with college operations. He should set the security plan in operation. He should inform the students involved, as well as he can in the situation, of the sanctions to which they are making themselves liable by their actions. If they persist in a disruptive action, he should get as many names as possible. He should keep a written record of these events and actions.

If the situation appears to endanger persons and property or interferes with the operations of the college beyond a tolerable time, the college must take steps to rid itself of the actions of the dissenters. There are two basic options: to remove the dissenters or to close the school. The situation will determine which is the best choice. The decision should be made by the President in consultation with the Dean of Students. Removal of students will usually involve the cooperation of the police. The decision to invite the police is one which should be made only after careful consideration of some of the possible consequences which we have seen demonstrated in recent student uprisings. Nothing has been so effective in galvanizing the support of the usually uncommitted middle of the student body as the sight of their fellow students being dragged off and possibly physically injured by police action.

During the confrontation, the Dean of Students should not

delegate to anyone else on his staff the business of issuing warnings, describing sanctions, or collecting names. Because such necessary disciplinary actions might close off communication with some students, the Dean should relieve other staff members of this burden.

Public information media should be invited in by the college and should be as fully informed as possible. It is important that the college's position and its good will be made clear in the news reports. Full cooperation with the press will help to diminish distortions which can contribute to embarrassing community reactions.

After the Confrontation

We come now to "after." The Dean of Students should appoint himself the conscience of the college to remind those who have responsibility for changes of the commitments which have been made to the students. If the changes in policies or procedures are in his own area he should, of course, effect them as quickly as possible.

If there are students who, by their conduct during the confrontation, are liable to disciplinary sanctions, the Dean of Students should institute proceedings at once, carefully observing the minimum conditions for due process. If there is an existing judicial body which passes on cases of student conduct, this body should conduct the hearings. If there is not such a body, one should be created, certainly with student representatives on it. There should be no suspensions prior to a formal judgment made by the appropriate judicial body.

With his staff, the Dean of Students should study the whole incident as soon as possible. He will want to discover why normal institutional processes of governance had failed to resolve the issues before the confrontation. He may want to recommend changes in these institutional processes. He will also want to discover as much as he can about the kind of students who were involved in the confrontation and about their concerns. His reaction here should not be simply defensive (preservation of the institution or of the status quo) but should be open to the possible discovery of needed change. He will not want to make himself or the college liable to the criticism which has been directed toward some of the studies and analyses already made of student unrest: that they are too intent on quantitative descriptions and on the kind of understanding of dissidents which can be used to neutralize their influence or even prevent their enrollment. I would hope that the reaction of the community colleges to student unrest would be more positive because I am convinced that one mission of the community college, perhaps its most important mission, is the leadership it can exercise among all institutions of higher education toward the effecting of long overdue changes in American colleges. A student confrontation is both a declaration of failure and an opportunity for success.

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